Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

MANUAL ACTIVITIES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL[1]

JESSE D. BURKS, PH.D.
Director of the Bureau of Municipal Research of Philadelphia

A distinguished New England theologian was once asked whether he considered Christianity to be a failure. He promptly replied: "I do not know, it has never yet been tried." Somewhat similarly, we might say that it is impossible to pass intelligent judgment upon manual activities in the elementary school for they have not been given a thorough and intelligent trial.

For thirty-five years educational leaders have had much to say concerning the need for manual activities in elementary education. During the latter part of this period the number of schools having manual training in their curricula has rapidly increased, until now one-half of the thirteen hundred organized local school systems in the United States have this subject in one or more of their elementary grades. In only one hundred and fifty of these cases, however, does handwork extend through all of the grades of the elementary schools, and of the six hundred school systems having manual training, three hundred give less than an hour a week to the subject, and only thirty-seven as much as half an hour a day.

These facts justify the statement that the country at large has not taken seriously the manual-training propaganda. Vastly more has been said than done and, with a few notable and gratifying exceptions, manual training remains in the main an isolated, abstract, and unprofitable fad; attached to, rather than incorporated in, the curriculum of the elementary school.

This means, of course, that, notwithstanding the notable advance in a few communities, the country as a whole has lost a magnificent opportunity for educational achievement. Enough time, money, and energy have been expended upon manual training in elementary schools during the past twenty-five years to have demonstrated the claims of its advocates—to have convinced the entire country that manual activities are not only desirable, but indispensable, in elementary education. Tax-payers have waited for facts while educational leaders have furnished opinions.

---

[1] Address delivered before the National Council of Education, on presentation of the report of the Committee on the Place of Industries in Public Education, J. D. Burks, chairman of the committee.

An inquiry was recently made among one hundred and fifty superintendents of schools, in cities having elementary manual training, as to the available evidence concerning the value of manual training. These superintendents were asked to indicate what records they had of work done and results obtained that would show the effect of manual training upon (*a*) regularity of attendance; (*b*) continuance of pupils in school (elimination); (*c*) rate of progress of pupils (retardation); (*d*) progress of pupils in other school subjects; (*e*) physical welfare of pupils, and (*f*) successes in vocations. They were asked also as to the available evidence concerning (*g*) the most profitable time allowance; (*h*) the value of manual training as an index of specific mental and physical traits; (*i*) specific abilities developed by various types of handwork; (*j*) the relative importance of native abilities and special training in determining successes in various types of school work and vocations.

It is extremely significant that 67 per cent of these superintendents stated that they had no data whatever upon these points, and that only 15 per cent stated that they had evidence on as many as five out of the ten points in the list.

In the absence of concrete evidence, school boards and taxpayers naturally and properly have maintained a skeptical attitude toward manual training. If there were no other reason this would be sufficient to explain the weak grip that manual training now has on the educational practice of the country.

For there is another important explanation of the failure of manual training to win its way. The very term "manual training" suggests the now discredited "faculty psychology" with its will-o'-the-wisp of general discipline.

In the general movement toward social aims and social motives in education, manual training has to a very large extent lagged behind. Possibly it is no farther behind than other subjects in the curriculum; but by reason of its early promise much more was expected of this subject than of others in support of a social program for the elementary schools. It is this demand for a more concrete and more distinctly social program that explains the extraordinary transformation of manual training that is now in progress.

The remarkable interest in industrial education, which is now probably the dominant factor in the educational thought of the country, has all but eclipsed the interest in elementary manual training. It is significant that the program of the manual-training department at the present session of the National Education Association is given over almost entirely to the consideration of industrial education, and this has been true of the programs of this department for the last three or four years.

Other evidences of the rising tide of interest in the industrial as opposed to mere manual activities in the school are of course familiar. Laymen and professional leaders of education alike have deplored the social injustice of a school system which provides directly for the special needs of the 25 per cent of children who ultimately enter the commercial and professional pursuits, but ignore the requirements of the 75 per cent who enter industrial pursuits. National and state teachers' associations have devoted a large part of their programs to the discussion of this urgent issue; a new department of the National Education Association has been established for the study and promotion of technical education; state legislatures, special commissions, a national society for the promotion of industrial education, manufacturers' associations, the United States commissioner of education, the governors of many states, the President of the United States, the American Federation of Labor, and numerous other bodies and individuals have added the weight of many preambles and resolutions to the nation-wide demand that the schools draw nearer to human needs and equip our boys and girls for the struggle of modern industrial life. The educational and general press has given the subject a degree of publicity that is rarely accorded any similar matter. The whole country has repeatedly been astounded by the statement that, according to the report of the state commission on industrial education, twenty-five thousand children in Massachusetts between the ages of fourteen and sixteen were either idle or at work.

During these years, elementary manual training, with only a distant relationship to vocational pursuits, like Cinderella has remained demurely in the background, waiting for some fairy godmother to change her tattered rags into silken robes.

More important than these reasons for the failure of manual training to hold its own in the struggle for recognition and support, however, is the fact that educational leaders themselves have not yet found a consistent and defensible basis upon which to develop a program of handwork in the elementary school.

One of the most significant features of the report on the place of industries in public education is the fact that it definitely recognizes the place of industries in elementary education, and presents a program which it is hoped will hasten the metamorphosis of manual training. The report was originally projected "for the purpose of collecting data concerning the manual training work done throughout the country," and to suggest "courses adaptable to various conditions."

While the report in its general scope is somewhat larger and possibly somewhat different from that originally proposed, the committee believes that, in view of current tendencies in thought and practice, it has properly interpreted the spirit of the resolution under which it has carried on its work.

The report of the subcommittee on industries in the elementary school attempts to sum up and put into coherent and concise form the results of the best thought and practice of recent years. If this service has been acceptably rendered, the reports should furnish at least a provisional starting-point for a more intelligent program of manual activities in the elementary school than has heretofore been attempted. That such a platform is sorely needed is evidenced by the striking lack of agreement among educational leaders as to the significance of manual activities in the elementary school.

In the inquiry before referred to, the superintendents were asked to indicate the importance which they attach to each of eight suggested values of manual training in the elementary school. These eight suggested values were as follows: (*a*) general mental training—e.g., accuracy, honesty; (*b*) general manual skill—e.g., precision, dexterity; (*c*) industrial intelligence—e.g., ability to learn a trade quickly; (*d*) specific abilities—e.g., skill in a particular process; (*e*) vital motive for school work otherwise uninteresting; (*f*) makes stronger and more lasting the results of instruction; (*g*) intelligent appreciation of industrial life; (*h*) culture—enrichment of intellectual and social experience.

In order to summarize these estimates of value, I have counted the number of cases in which a superintendent placed each of the suggested values in the upper half of his own list, that is, first, second, third, or fourth in order of importance. Rated in this way the list stands as follows: general mental training, 65; industrial intelligence, 57; general manual skill, 55; vital motive for school work, 50; intelligent appreciation of industrial life, 45; strengthening the results of instruction, 40; culture, 40; development of specific abilities, 20.

General training is given first rank by 29; culture by 20; and general manual skill by 17.

It is instructive to note that while the great majority of the superintendents were perfectly frank in admitting the lack of concrete evidence as to the effect of manual training upon the mental and physical development of children, they had no hesitation whatever in making a definite rating of each of the suggested values for manual training.

One of the superintendents frankly states that he has not studied the question and gives no answers. One states that his estimates are guesswork; one feels much uncertainty beyond the first two or three; and one states that in his judgment the importance varies with the pupils. The others give definite estimates, in almost all cases assigning weight to each of the eight suggested effects.

These answers make it evident that there is no general agreement among our active leaders in education as to the place of manual training in the elementary school. Unless there can be a more widespread agreement, tentatively, at least, upon the place of industries in the elementary school, we cannot expect results during the coming decade to be more favorable than those of the past decade.

If the conclusions of the committee's report can command the confidence of educational leaders, and can be accepted as a point of departure, a tremendous step in advance will have been taken. In addition to this there should be a concerted effort to avoid one of the most serious mistakes of the past by providing for definite records of work undertaken and results accomplished, that will enable teachers, superintendents, members of boards of education, and citizens everywhere to read the story of achievement for any school or system of schools that has such a story to tell.

When educational leaders are in position to support their arguments by adequate records of work done and results accomplished, they will get not merely the uninformed and passive approval, but the active and intelligent co-operation of the communities whose educational interests they serve. With such co-operation under informed leadership in every community, we shall approach the time when sham and inefficiency will be eliminated from our system of education and 100 per cent of our children will get 100 per cent of the value that school training should represent.